DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 449 480

CS 014 246

AUTHOR	Yaden, David B., Jr.; Tam, Anamarie
TITLE	Enhancing Emergent Literacy in a Preschool Program through Teacher-Researcher Collaboration. CIERA Report.
INSTITUTION	Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, Ann Arbor, MI.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	CIERA-2-011
PUB DATE	2000-12-15
NOTE	22p.
CONTRACT	R305R70004
AVAILABLE FROM	CIERA/University of Michigan, 610 E. University Ave., 1600 SEB, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259. Web site: http://www.ciera.org.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Case Studies; *Emergent Literacy; Inner City; Low Income; Preschool Education; Program Implementation; *Teacher Behavior; Teacher Response; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	Teacher Researcher Relationship

ABSTRACT

This paper describes attempts to implement an emergent literacy intervention in a child-care setting in a high-poverty, Spanish bilingual setting in downtown Los Angeles. Specifically, it discusses the authors' work with a particular preschool teacher, explaining how the research team and the teacher were able to overcome their original biases and collaboratively develop an intervention that was truly responsive to the needs of the children and the community. Contains 25 references and 2 figures. (Author/RS)

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David B. Yaden, Jr., and Anamarie Tam
University of Southern California

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CIERA REPORT # 2-011
December 15,2000

CIERA
Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

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CIERA Inquiry 2: Home and School
How can a preschool environment attended by Spanish speaking children be designed to aid children in getting a good start in reading? How can preschool teachers' own funds of knowledge be incorporated into emergent literacy interventions?

In this paper, Yaden and Tam describe their attempt to implement an emergent literacy intervention in a child-care setting in a high-poverty, Spanish bilingual setting in downtown Los Angeles. Specifically, they discuss their work with a particular preschool teacher, explaining how the research team and the teacher were able to overcome their original biases and collaboratively develop an intervention that was truly responsive to the needs of the children and the community.

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

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CIERA
Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

University of Michigan School of Education

610 E University Ave., Rm 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

734.647.6940 voice
734.615.4858 fax
ciera@umich.edu

www.ciera.org

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This research was supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. However, the comments do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute of Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment or the National Institute on Early Childhood Development, or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Enhancing Emergent Literacy in a Preschool Program Through Teacher-Researcher Collaboration

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University of Southern California

Improving students' literacy achievement is a top priority in education. While elementary and secondary schools struggle to enhance students' reading and writing skills to higher levels needed to succeed in a technologically advanced society, early childhood education programs are being reexamined for practices that can strengthen students' literacy before they enter kindergarten (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Yaden, Rowe, & MacGillivray, 2000). This paper will describe briefly the design of an emergent literacy intervention which has attempted to be responsive and sensitive to the social and cultural resources that exist within the community, home, and school in order to increase the literacy learning of four-year-old children in an inner-city child-care center. Within this larger research project, we will highlight a case study of the interactions between the university research team and one of the teachers as an example of how sensitivity to the needs, beliefs, and practices of the preschool teachers improved collaboration and strengthened the impact of the intervention on students' emerging literacy.

The overall study from which this case is drawn is a four-year, longitudinal examination of the effectiveness of a preschool emergent literacy intervention in a private child-care and development facility. This facility is located in a high-poverty, Spanish bilingual setting in downtown Los Angeles. The primary purpose of the project is to provide multiple opportunities for the children in two four-year-old preschool classes to engage in a variety of culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate reading and writing activities within the center, at home, and in the surrounding community.

Although the interactions with the home and community contribute significantly to the overall impact of this project, this case focuses on the curricular interventions within one classroom context. The key research questions guiding the classroom interventions are as follows:

- How do emergent literacy activities influence the Spanish and English literacy learning abilities of preschool children in an inner-city community child-care setting?

- What kinds of English language and literacy support can be provided by teachers in a primarily Spanish-speaking community?
- What is the nature of the literacy environment resulting from this sort of collaboration in this setting?
- How can the community's and teaching staff's "funds of knowledge" be incorporated into a structured preschool emergent literacy program?

The case description primarily focuses upon the last question and the resulting outcome of strengthened collaboration between the research team and teaching staff.

An Emergent Literacy Intervention Model

Central to understanding the focus of both the overall research project and the case study are some assumptions related to emergent literacy. While the term emergent literacy is subject to varying definitions (Yaden et al., 2000), we adhere to a developmental and constructivist view of emergent literacy—one that acknowledges the continuous development of literacy from birth through interaction with others and within a stimulating environment. From this perspective, literacy is "social, psycholinguistic, conceptual, and developmental in nature" and differs from "reading readiness" in its view of literacy as an ever-expanding set of experiences and activities rather than the product of either natural maturation or the acquisition of prerequisite skills (Teale & Sulzby, 1986, p. xxi).

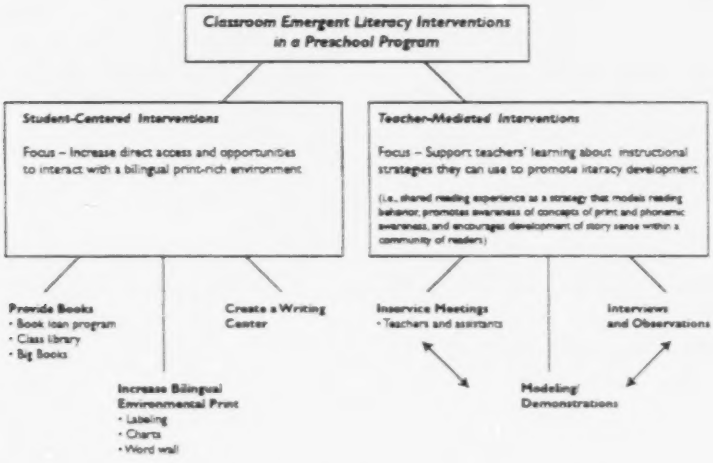
Based on this developmental view, emergent literacy is embedded in the sociocultural contexts of home and community as well as in the more formal instructional contexts represented in a preschool. In these contexts, the interaction of young children with literate others as well as in literacy events contributes to emergent literacy (McGee & Purcell-Gates, 1997). In an attempt to address these different contexts, we organized our literacy interventions in the classroom into (a) student-centered interventions, which emphasize students' self-initiated engagement in literacy events; and (b) teacher-mediated interventions, which recognize the important role of the teacher in modeling, guiding, and supporting students in meaningful reading and writing interactions. An overview of these initial interventions is represented in Figure 1 and discussed in the following two sections.

Student-Centered Interventions

The initial focus of the emergent literacy intervention was to promote opportunities for students to interact with print. Direct access to literacy materials and activities gives students enriched opportunities to construct their own understandings of reading and writing. In the context of our intervention, these activities included: (a) making multiple copies of books in English and Spanish available in both the class library and parent book loan

program; (b) increasing bilingual environmental print (including labeling, charts, and a word wall) in the classroom; and (c) developing a writing center containing a variety of writing supplies, including pencils, markers, envelopes, "sticky notes," and an assortment of paper. In addition, the presence of sociodramatic play areas in each classroom (e.g., kitchen, dress-up, blocks) complemented student activity at the writing center; the students used writing center materials to read and write as they engaged in creative and imaginative role-playing (cf. Neuman & Roskos, 1991, 1997; Rowe, 1998).

Figure 1. An emergent literacy intervention model.


Classroom Emergent Literacy Interventions in a Preschool Program
Student-Centered Interventions
Focus – Increase direct access and opportunities to interact with a bilingual print-rich environment
Teacher-Mediated Interventions
Focus – Support teachers' learning about instructional strategies they can use to promote literacy development
(i.e., shared reading experience as a strategy that models reading behavior, promotes awareness of concepts of print and phonemic awareness, and encourages development of story sense within a community of readers)
Provide Books
• Book loan program
• Class library
• Big Books
Create a Writing Center
Increase Bilingual Environmental Print
• Labeling
• Charts
• Word wall
Inservice Meetings
• Teachers and assistants
Interviews and Observations
Modeling/ Demonstrations

Providing a language- and print-rich environment is especially important for minority and high-poverty students who may have limited access to materials or literacy experiences consistent with practices encountered in formal schooling (August & Hakuta, 1997; Garcia, 2000). Recognizing that these students may experience diverse forms and uses of language and literacy shaped by the cultural, social, economic, and political contexts surrounding their homes, we acknowledged the need to immerse students in an environment in which they had literacy tools with which to play, explore, and construct understandings about reading and writing. Dyson's (1993) ethnographic study of urban children in the primary grades vividly portrays the language and literacy development of children from diverse populations when given the opportunity to engage in a social context that validates their language resources and diverse backgrounds and does not constrain literacy learnings to formal, structured, teacher-directed lessons.

Teacher-Mediated Intervention

Though a print-rich learning context in school is important, its impact can be enhanced or weakened through the key role played by the teacher. As outlined by Strickland and Morrow (1989), children construct their knowledge about print and their strategies for reading and writing from their inde-

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pendent explorations of written language, from interactions with parents and other literate persons, and from their observations of others engaged in literacy activities. Therefore, the teacher plays a critical role in modeling literacy behaviors, enhancing access to meaningful literacy activities, and creating stronger links between home and school to promote literacy learning. Helping students build knowledge and assist their performance reflects a Vygotskian view of the teacher as facilitator who mediates student learning by providing needed supports, or scaffolding, for student success (Moll, 1990). Hence, our emergent literacy intervention incorporated a strand devoted to supporting teachers as they, in turn, supported the literacy growth of their students.

The primary focus of our teacher-mediated intervention was the use of Big Books for shared reading. By participating in a shared reading experience, the students observe a proficient reader and join in to read familiar text while developing an understanding of concepts of print such as directionality, parts of a book, and a sense of word/letter/sentence. Other intervention programs that have focused on emergent literacy in preschool settings have reported the positive effects of storybook reading in the classroom and/or home (Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore, 1992; Whitehurst, Arnold et al., 1994; Whitehurst, Epstein et al., 1994). Since each reader brings various levels of prior knowledge, sociocultural practices, beliefs, and developing literacy to the act of reading, an intervention should also be sensitive to these resources in both teachers and students (see Delgado-Gaitan, 1996).

Building Awareness of Funds of Knowledge

Sensitivity to the sociocultural context in which literacy develops for the children in this preschool program was a critical aspect of this intervention. We recognized the need to develop a deeper understanding of the social and cultural resources that both students and teachers bring to the learning contexts in school and how they may impact planned interventions. Consequently, the majority of the research team's time during the first three months of the classroom intervention was devoted to getting to know the students, teachers, and parents through individual interviews and focus groups and through becoming participant observers in the daily routine of the classroom. As we began to piece together a better picture of the students' social worlds, we knew we needed to reevaluate how the intervention "fit" into this particular setting while remaining aware that the emergent literacy behaviors we sought to increase needed to have significance in the schooling context these students would enter as kindergartners. For example, over 95% of these students speak Spanish as their primary language and receive mostly Spanish language instruction in this child-care setting. However, when these students enter their neighborhood's public kindergarten, they will enter a learning environment that will limit language and literacy development to English only or provide very minimal primary language support. Therefore, our planned interventions needed to consider the role and use of two languages both prior to and during public schooling.

As Moll (1992) pointed out, funds of knowledge can be viewed as bodies of information and strategies exchanged within social networks and used to maintain the well-being of the social unit. Viewing schooling also as a socio-

cultural process (cf. Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000), we investigated the funds of knowledge teachers and students brought into school and tried to incorporate these understandings into our planned emergent literacy interventions in an effort to make them more culturally responsive (Moll, 1992). In preschool settings that traditionally place a high priority on play and socialization skills, it is important to examine ways that emergent literacy can be enhanced within the existing social networks and the participants' knowledge base.

Becoming sensitive to the ways these strategies and existing bodies of knowledge influenced the context of learning in this preschool setting involved recognizing the importance of what and how the teacher taught, as well as the integral role of language and culture in the classroom. As described by Trueba (1989), language and culture are intimately related to the process of early socialization; failure to examine both can lead to misunderstanding the process by which a student acquires knowledge and participates in schooling or other institutions. zThe classroom, thus, is a "community of practice" in which students develop literacy strategies within the social practices of the classroom culture (Donato & McCormick, 1994). The effort to build a community of practice to enhance students emergent literacy is strengthened by actively uncovering the funds of knowledge that a teacher draws upon to support student learning. Therefore, in theory at least, our research is founded on the notion that a comprehensive curricular intervention model should examine and try to incorporate the communal knowledge and practices reflected by the adults, including parents and teachers, who create the literacy learning contexts for the children. In practice, however, we found that our very assumptions about the meaning of the term *intervention* were challenged. We also realized that the process of implementing this intervention relied heavily on our capacity to nurture a collaborative relationship which would increase both the commitment and willingness to change on the part of everyone involved. The following case study illustrates that, despite our intent to incorporate emergent literacy activities in a manner responsive to the perceived cultural capital of the participants in this learning environment, we needed to deeply reflect on our own level of flexibility in adjusting to the beliefs of the participants we discovered without compromising other goals in our research design.

Cultural Capital at Work: A Case Study

We used ethnographic methods of inquiry (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) in this portion of the project in order to describe the teacher's beliefs and practices. Weekly observations of and interviews with the teacher provided ongoing feedback about the implementation and integration of the intervention (i.e., the use of a shared reading experience) into the learning and social context of the classroom. Although we anticipated feedback to make needed modifications within the intervention, our implicit assumption was that the teacher would welcome and benefit the most from this collaborative effort.

Participants

In the school year during which we conducted the study, one teacher and two assistants worked in each of the two preschool classrooms of four-year-old students. There were approximately 25 students enrolled in each classroom. For this case study, only the activities of one teacher, Mr. Herrera (pseudonym), will be described. At the time of the study, Mr. Herrera had taught in this particular preschool setting for five years. Mr. Herrera is fluently bilingual in both English and Spanish and immigrated to the United States from El Salvador when he was 12. He was sent by his mother to the United States after several of his friends disappeared at the hands of guerillas. Thus, he experienced the challenges of learning English as a second language and understanding the schooling system in a different cultural context.

The majority of students live within five miles of the childcare center. Their homes are located in some of the highest poverty areas near downtown Los Angeles and in areas of high gang concentration. Based on figures from the child-care administration, over 60% of these students come from single parent homes (usually with the mother as head of household) and have three or four siblings. Over 98% live below the federal poverty levels with an average household monthly income of less than $1,000. Many of the parents work near the preschool in the neighboring toy and clothing factories. With the exception of one English-speaking student, all of the children spoke Spanish as their primary language.

Procedures and Data Collection

The case study data were collected over six months by three researchers. Eight formal open-ended interviews were conducted, in addition to weekly informal discussions following the observation of morning circle time reading activities. The interview topics included early childhood teaching practices and beliefs, the perceived benefit of storybook reading, facets of curriculum, and the students' and their families' backgrounds. Observations of the teacher's book reading occurred during the morning circle time, which typically lasted 30–45 minutes. Additional observations of the teacher and students were made during the remaining language arts block of 60–90 minutes. Observations were conducted, on average, twice a week, and described the classroom environment including the physical set-up, the social climate, and interactions among the staff and children during activities and lessons. The observations also included segments of the dialog between the teacher and children during the book reading. Detailed field notes were written for 22 of these observations. Although more detailed analysis of the field notes continues, preliminary coding of recurring teaching practices and teacher-student interactions during the book reading reflected consistency with many of the beliefs he shared during the interviews. The information from the interviews and observations provided an initial understanding of the teacher's own funds of knowledge as well as his perception of the parents' contributions to their children's learning abilities.

Building on the information shared between the research team and both of the teachers and assistants, we chose to hold monthly inservice sessions. These workshops provided a forum for the teachers and the assistants to share their experiences, beliefs, and questions related to selected aspects of the intervention during each meeting. Approximately six inservice sessions highlighted the importance of reading to students and the benefits of using a Big Book for shared reading. A detailed description of how to do a Big Book shared reading was presented and discussed at one of these inservice meetings and informally discussed later with each teacher. Shared reading also was modeled four times by our research team in Mr. Herrera's classroom. Over the course of the three months, five English and/or Spanish Big Books were purchased each month with companion sets of little books for classroom use.

Results

Disagreement on the Benefit and Practice of Shared Big Book Reading

The initial intervention was developed in response to preliminary observations of the teacher's book reading. During these observations the teacher did not "read" the book; instead, he flipped through the pages and told a story based on the pictures. He drew on a rich oral storytelling tradition to make the characters come alive by using different voices and gestures. Within this storytelling, he did not provide any discussion about reading processes such as directionality, nor did he draw attention to the print, including the title and author. Therefore, the preliminary intervention highlighted the use of a shared book experience to enhance students' understanding of concepts about print and provide a nurturing literacy event that encouraged students not only to enjoy the meaning of the story, but to participate in reading and rereading familiar text.

After observing research team members model several shared reading events in his classroom, Mr. Herrera attempted his first shared reading of a Big Book while a researcher observed. At the end of this experience, Mr. Herrera admitted that he felt uncomfortable with the Big Book's overall size, its content, and the potential for student disinterest. Although he reiterated his commitment to attending to the print, identifying the parts of the book, and commenting upon the reading process, he clearly stated his desire for a shift away from using the Big Books to the utilization of a smaller book of his choice.

When one of the researchers asked Mr. Herrera whether the continued use of Big Books would be an obstacle to his teaching, he answered "yes," and stated that since he consistently pointed out the parts of a book and other salient book reading processes, he didn't see what difference it made if he continued using small books brought from home or the public library.

Subsequently, although the teacher did use the small books in lieu of the Big Books, ongoing observations showed that he rarely focused students' attention on the print, the parts of a book, or the process of reading words on a page; neither did he invite his students to participate in rereading familiar parts of the story. Instead, the teacher continually returned to his familiar reading style—the attention-grabbing, dramatic storytelling format. This rich, entertaining, and theatrical storytelling consistently dominated the time dedicated for literacy activities.

Occasionally, he used the circle time to conduct a science experiment or other demonstration (such as a magic trick), and most of the stories he selected related to a monthly theme. As he shared a story, he usually showed the students the pictures but constructed his own retelling of the story. He enlivened the story by adding character voices and movements. He often closed or lowered the book as he reenacted the storyline. During these observations, he did not read more than a few sentences of the text; nor did the students have the opportunity to join in on rereadings or comment to any great degree on the story.

What To Do When Big Books Don't Work

The research team was initially baffled about how the teacher's reading style could be integrated into the Big Book intervention, particularly since he viewed the book as disrupting his teaching style and of little interest to the children. Recognizing in theory that a Big Book shared reading could vary in delivery, the research team posed a series of questions: What do you do when an intervention does not work as planned (especially when the intervention is widely acknowledged in the literature as successful)? Do you abandon it altogether and not force the issue? Or can you focus on the variation and somehow figure out a way to incorporate it into the method without diluting either the strength of the original method or the variation itself?

In order to address these questions, we knew it was important to examine our intervention through the lens of a deeper understanding of the teacher's beliefs as reflected in his teaching practices. Thus, we focused on gathering more data through extensive classroom observations and interviews. In this process, we hoped to promote stronger trust between the researchers and teacher to enhance our capacity for collaborative planning.

Changing the Assumptive Lens and Refocusing Our View

Through additional interviews, we gained insight to the teacher's knowledge about the community, his perception of his teaching role, and his views of his students as learners. He mentioned the importance of knowing about the students' families and community. He described the waiting list of families trying to get into the program and how they appreciated all the extra social services provided by the center—so much so that many kept working at their low paying jobs because they are in the local vicinity of the preschool program.

Though these parents faced economic challenges, Mr. Herrera explained how they could play an important role in their children's education. Although he mentioned that few parents could read in English, he described how parents are required to volunteer three hours a month in the classroom doing a variety of jobs including washing dishes and cleaning up after snacks or other activities. These facility maintenance tasks may seem menial, but he pointed out that as they help they "watch" what happens in class. "I want them to watch me do it (book reading), and maybe they will do it at home."

He further reflected on his role as a teacher in this preschool. "My daily goal is for students to enjoy being here in this classroom." In each interview, Mr. Herrera echoed a theme of learning as a game. He felt his role as a teacher was to "introduce the basics, and create a playful learning atmosphere . . . with lots of activities and fun time." He added, "The way you introduce a lesson needs to be like magic." He explained that this is the way to "get them engaged." He expressed his pride in being able to keep his students attentive and responsive to his teaching/performance for close to 45 minutes. He firmly stated his belief in the children's intelligence manifested by their ability to absorb the information he shared with them through fun and play, and without formal instruction. Several times he mentioned being surprised at what the children pick up when they are simply exposed to concepts that they probably do not develop at home.

He described the social networks that surround the students: "When it comes to learning, it is a triangle. The community, school, and parents are the sides and the kid is in the middle. If any one side is missing the triangle is not whole." So when students' social life away from school is full of "lots of stressful situations... learning [serves] as therapy." He emphasized that the goal is to engage students through fun and play in a game, creating a learning situation in which "there are no losers." Paramount in teaching was providing something that would help them improve their self-esteem.

Mr. Herrera also expressed high expectations for needed support from his students' parents. He mentioned that he frequently talks to the parents to encourage them to get involved with their children's education. He knows the challenges they face with the basics of living such as transportation, clothing, housing, and food. Yet he asks them to be more active in their children's education by participating in activities such as taking them to the zoo and museum to make connections to the themes he focuses on in class.

Mr. Herrera also cited his own schooling experience in order to demonstrate how parents can make the difference in their children's motivation to learn. He described how his parents made a great effort for him to attend schools in El Salvador and took the time to reinforce learning opportunities at home. He expressed concern that when he came to the United States as a teenager, he saw other students who were citizens by birth, but seemed to lack the motivation to take advantage of the many opportunities to learn and further their education. By his own effort and motivation, he soon surpassed students in his English as a Second Language courses and could soon participate in the mainstream courses. As of this writing, his strong belief in the power of education has remained visible as he continues to take coursework in the area of early childhood education. He will soon complete his bachelor's degree and subsequently begin a master's in which he will earn his teaching credential.

Looking at this through another lens of understanding, we can see that Mr. Herrera's style of teaching is aimed at having a much more far reaching effect than the acquisition of early literacy skills. His invitations to students to experience the playfulness of language can be viewed as the "learning therapy" he stressed throughout our interviews. By making students laugh and enjoy school, he creates a learning environment which is both nurturing and safe for these students coming from difficult home lives and circumstances. Most of his students come from homes in which they have limited access to literacy materials and, oftentimes, parents who have limited reading skills in English. Hence, oral language becomes the primary vehicle for sharing meaning between children and adults. Mr. Herrera draws upon the dynamics of storytelling so that his book "reading" is not only a means to entertain students, but also a method to expose them to concepts about their world that may be unfamiliar. As he creates his own story related to a book's illustrations, he uses role playing, characters' voices, and dramatic gestures to expand the story from the two dimensions of the text into a more realistic three-dimensional world for these four-year-old students. Consistent with the traditions of oral language delivery (see Havelock, 1963), the "book reading" becomes both a historical narrative to create a sense of identity in this foreign culture as well as a description of how the world works, a template for living created by a caring teacher, and a narrative spell woven by the wisdom of the community for the children's benefit and instruction.

Reinventing Big Book Sharing

Looking through Mr. Herrera's eyes, we saw the wealth of resources that he drew upon during the storytelling. He adeptly used his knowledge of students' backgrounds and experiences to make connections during morning circle time. His strong belief in making story time fun and entertaining resulted in multiple opportunities to play with language (e.g., songs, jokes, repetition of playful phrases). This knowledge about the teacher is critical within a sociocultural framework. However, we were still concerned that not inviting students to experience the more formal aspects of reading and attention to the words on the page might result in a lost opportunity to develop concepts that are highly valued in the schooling context these students would be entering in the next year. Thus, we considered ways to provide opportunities for the children to be engaged with print in a safe, nurturing, and playful environment while remaining responsive to what we were discovering about participants in this learning community.

In response, we modified the shared reading intervention to be more consistent with the teacher's practices and beliefs while still including aspects of Big Book sharing that expose children to the formal aspects of print. In short, we involved the teacher in collaborative Big Book writing that (a) connected to his monthly themes, (b) used familiar text patterns that invited children to play with language through rhyme and repetition, and (c) invited students to engage in English language development through the use of familiar language patterns that extended concepts developed during the month. We also developed "little book" versions of the Big Book for students to reread at home. One specific example involved a question/answer text format that relied heavily on repetition and rhyme as seen in *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin, 1982). In contrast to the teacher's

initial resistance toward using Big Books in a shared reading experience, Mr. Herrera showed strong interest for using these texts tailored to match his curriculum (cf. Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992; Wells, 1999). For example, a Big Book was written highlighting the Christmas theme. As he read the text, he was able to observe the students' enthusiasm for reading a book with familiar language patterns, rhyme, repetition, and concepts and ideas discussed in class. The classroom echoed with the voices of the children as they chimed in and loudly read sentences such as "Santa, Santa, what do you see?" As a result, Mr. Herrera began to appreciate shared reading as more than just the use of a cumbersome large text written in difficult "boring" language when compared to his dramatic storytelling. Rather, he saw that incorporating familiar language patterns and vocabulary and concepts highlighted in his monthly themes could make book reading a useful tool to facilitate English language development. Subsequently, he reread the texts and made them available to students by placing them in the class library, as well as sending home the little book versions so that students could share them with their family.

Even after the use of just three of the jointly written Big Books and little books, student reading behaviors began to reflect behaviors modeled during the shared reading. During independent reading time, small groups of two to four students consistently used the Big Book. They were assimilating the teacher's modeling by reading the title on the cover and title page, turning pages sequentially, pointing to words instead of pictures, and following words from left to right and top to bottom.

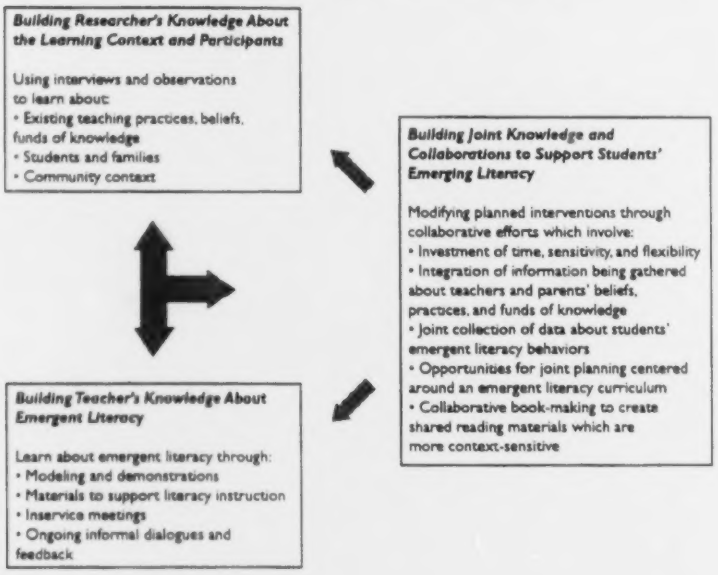
What Did We Learn?

As illustrated in this case study, building trust and collaboration over time enhanced the planned emergent literacy interventions in the classroom. Rather than abandoning the use of shared reading with large print texts, we modified the intervention based on what we learned about Mr. Herrera's teaching beliefs and his knowledge about his students, their social and economic conditions, and the cultural and linguistic background they shared with him. As Wells (1999) has written, without connecting the shared reading experience to existing classroom practices, we would be attempting to implement an intervention without establishing teacher "buy-in." As "guests" in this preschool setting, we developed a deeper appreciation of the need to develop relationships with the preschool staff, students, and parents that would foster collaborative ventures.

As indicated in Figure 2, the process of building trust and collaboration facilitates both teacher and researcher change when there is reciprocity between the partners. It is a complex process that necessitates a greater investment of time in relationship building than the research team had ever expected. Building joint knowledge and collaboratively developing ways to support both students' emergent literacy and successful teacher behaviors within this context was possible only after we as researchers committed ourselves to understanding the child-care center, the teachers, the students, and the parents beyond our own preconceptions about appropriate methods for

"high-risk," "high-poverty" environments. Even the use of terms such as "high-risk" made us consider more carefully and move beyond the limits of our own professional discourse and metalanguage so that we could come closer to describing the students and their parents and teachers on their own terms.

Figure 2. Building trust and collaboration between researchers and teachers in order to facilitate curricular change.


Building Researcher's Knowledge About the Learning Context and Participants
Using interviews and observations to learn about:
• Existing teaching practices, beliefs, funds of knowledge
• Students and families
• Community context
Building Joint Knowledge and Collaborations to Support Students' Emerging Literacy
Modifying planned interventions through collaborative efforts which involve:
• Investment of time, sensitivity, and flexibility
• Integration of information being gathered about teachers and parents' beliefs, practices, and funds of knowledge
• Joint collection of data about students' emergent literacy behaviors
• Opportunities for joint planning centered around an emergent literacy curriculum
• Collaborative book-making to create shared reading materials which are more context-sensitive
Building Teacher's Knowledge About Emergent Literacy
Learn about emergent literacy through:
• Modeling and demonstrations
• Materials to support literacy instruction
• Inservice meetings
• Ongoing informal dialogues and feedback

Building Our Knowledge About the Learning Context and the Participants, or Confronting Our Own Researcher Biases

As a university research team, we entered the child-care center with the goal of improving students' emergent literacy behaviors in the context of the intellectual, social, and cultural resources that existed within this school's community. However, there was little recognition on our part that the methods we were employing and that had worked in what we believed to be similar contexts might not work here. The realization that shared Big Book reading might not have a place in this preschool was a hard pill to swallow.

However, as we invested time in the classroom, watching, listening, and asking questions, we slowly developed trusting relationships which, in turn, fostered more exchange of information. In addition, as we took a more active role in the classroom by not only working with the students and modeling teaching behaviors but also helping with support tasks such as serving breakfast, cleaning up, or supervising on the playground, we were accepted as partners working with the teaching staff rather than as outside experts who wanted to change practices without really attempting to understand them.

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Building Teacher Knowledge About Emergent Literacy by First Appreciating Existing Practices

Developing a more collaborative working relationship with the teachers grew out of formal and informal conversations within and outside of the classroom. As the researchers spent more time in Mr. Herrera's class interacting with the children and helping out in various classroom routines, Mr. Herrera felt more comfortable sharing information about himself and his students. As relationships improved in the classroom, Mr. Herrera also showed more receptivity to learning about research related to emergent literacy during inservice meetings. He listened attentively to what was presented and shared many examples of his own teaching, explaining how these were relevant to the overall goal of the project. In addition to these meetings, the research team continued to model a variety of reading strategies with groups of students to provide further examples for our continuing discussions about promoting emergent literacy. Very slowly, over time, Mr. Herrera became more receptive to the researchers' informal feedback on his own lessons, just as the researchers profited from his observations of researcher-modeled activities. Although Mr. Herrera never wavered in his confidence concerning his teaching style and methods, he became much more aware of other strategies that he could choose to incorporate into his way of teaching.

Building Joint Knowledge and Collaborations to Support Students' Emerging Literacy, or Learning to Learn From Each Other

In this case study, Mr. Herrera began to use more shared reading strategies when Big Books were collaboratively developed to better match his perceptions of teaching and learning, and his perception of his students' needs. When books were developed that matched his themes and incorporated familiar language play through rhyme and repetition, he felt less need to retell and render his own version of the story. Having incorporated information about Mr. Herrera's teaching practices, his knowledge about the students, and his beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices, these teacher-made Big Books were far more successful in fostering exposure to formal aspects of print than were the commercial Big Books we had initially purchased for the classroom.

The need to continue building our joint knowledge and fostering additional collaborative efforts to work toward the overall goal of the research project is still very much apparent. With frequent staffing changes, new "voices" and beliefs about teaching young children are continually added to the dynamics of this preschool. We have already modified inservice meetings by involving the teachers as partners in collecting and sharing observations of related student behaviors, rather than presenting "best practices" according to "experts" who the participants have no reason to trust and with whom they have no relationship. Nonetheless, in time, as relationships are developed, we have seen that the growing credibility of the research team can be slowly transferred to the more abstract research community, to which the participants begin to see themselves as contributing.

In summary, we now understand that the implementation of our planned intervention first needed to incorporate knowledge of and sensitivity to the learning context created by the teacher and students. Change did not occur until both teachers and researchers were willing to learn from each other. Building teacher or researcher knowledge was not effective in isolation. Instead, as this knowledge was applied within the dynamic classroom learning context, it became joint knowledge, which shaped the development and refinement of the shared reading intervention.

Conclusion

The success of the curricular intervention at this preschool is the product of sharing knowledge and working together. Subsequently, as the teacher co-created, practiced, and judged the success of the intervention's elements within his daily teaching routines, he himself became a change agent, working alongside the university researchers (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992). In a real sense, the researchers have become an additional node in the network of communal knowledge in this learning environment (Luis Moll, personal communication, April, 2000). As our understanding of the importance of the mutual exchange of information has deepened, our role as researchers, and more importantly as other adults perceived by the community as interested in the welfare of their children, has been greatly enhanced. Further, it is not inaccurate to say that the quality or plausibility of our "data," both now and in the future, is and will be largely proportional to the quality of the relationships we develop within this setting. The sensitivity, time, and patience needed to foster this collegial and amicable relationship has implications for other preschools seeking outside intervention or help to strengthen their curricular program.

By actively involving the teaching staff in enhancing other planned interventions in this preschool program, we are striving to create a supportive context for change that will strengthen the students' emerging literacy. We hope that, as the emergent literacy intervention becomes a joint construction, the foundation is being created for curricular improvement that can be sustained without the future presence of the research team. At present, we are exploring how this transition might be made.

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About CIERA

The Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA) is the national center for research on early reading and represents a consortium of educators in five universities (University of Michigan, University of Virginia, and Michigan State University with University of Southern California and University of Minnesota), teacher educators, teachers, publishers of texts, tests, and technology, professional organizations, and schools and school districts across the United States. CIERA is supported under the Educational Research and Development Centers Program, PR/Award Number R305R70004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

Mission. CIERA's mission is to improve the reading achievement of America's children by generating and disseminating theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading.

CIERA Research Model

The model that underlies CIERA's efforts acknowledges many influences on children's reading acquisition. The multiple influences on children's early reading acquisition can be represented in three successive layers, each yielding an area of inquiry of the CIERA scope of work. These three areas of inquiry each present a set of persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading:

CIERA INQUIRY 1
Readers and Texts

Characteristics of readers and texts and their relationship to early reading achievement. What are the characteristics of readers and texts that have the greatest influence on early success in reading? How can children's existing knowledge and classroom environments enhance the factors that make for success?

CIERA INQUIRY 2
Home and School

Home and school effects on early reading achievment. How do the contexts of homes, communities, classrooms, and schools support high levels of reading achievement among primary-level children? How can these contexts be enhanced to ensure high levels of reading achievement for all children?

CIERA INQUIRY 3
Policy and Profession

Policy and professional effects on early reading achievement. How can new teachers be initiated into the profession and experienced teachers be provided with the knowledge and dispositions to teach young children to read well? How do policies at all levels support or detract from providing all children with access to high levels of reading instruction?

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CIERA

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

CIERA is a collaboration of
University of Michigan
University of Virginia
Michigan State University

with
University of Minnesota
University of Southern California

University of Michigan School of Education
610 E University Av, Rm 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259

734.647.6940 voice
734.763.1229 fax
ciera@umich.edu

www.ciera.org